

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



Proposed Action: John Day-Marion No. 1 Transmission Line, Access Road Maintenance

Project No.: 395552

Project Manager: Randal Browning, Access Road Engineer – TFLF-TPP-3

Location: Wasco County, Oregon

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3 Routine maintenance

Description of the Proposed Action: BPA proposes to perform routine road maintenance, repair, and improvements on the John Day-Marion Access Road. The proposed work is necessary to maintain or repair existing infrastructure and roadway safety. The proposed project includes the following features:

- Existing access road improvements (27,200 linear feet);
- Existing access roads reconstruction (4,900 lineal feet);
- Mowing on road prism (19,300 lineal feet).

The project would include reshaping, grading, and compacting existing road surface as well as hauling, placing, and shaping of crushed rock on the roadway surface. In addition, the project would involve the installation of 75 water bars, and 19 drain dips within the roadway prism, replacement of four gates and mowing/removal of vegetation along much of the existing road surface. The described road maintenance activities are proposed for construction in 2018. No in-water work would be conducted.

Findings: In accordance with Section 1021.410(b) of the Department of Energy's (DOE) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Regulations (57 FR 15144, Apr. 24, 1992, as amended at 61 FR 36221-36243, July 9, 1996; 61 FR 64608, Dec. 6, 1996, 76 FR 63764, Nov. 14, 2011), BPA has determined that the proposed action:

- (1) fits within a class of actions listed in Appendix B of 10 CFR 1021, Subpart D (see attached Environmental Checklist);
- (2) does not present any extraordinary circumstances that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal; and
- (3) has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion.

Based on these determinations, BPA finds that the proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

/s/ John Wiley

John Wiley

Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel

Sarah T. Biegel

NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: September 7, 2018

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

Categorical Exclusion Environmental Checklist

This checklist documents environmental considerations for the proposed project and explains why the project would not have the potential to cause significant impacts on environmentally sensitive resources and would meet other integral elements of the applied categorical exclusion.

Proposed Action: John Day-Marion No.1 Transmission Line, Access Road Maintenance

Project Site Description

A site evaluation was conducted by Otak biologists on July 25, 2017, to evaluate site conditions and the surrounding environment. The proposed project is located near the community of Tygh Valley in rural Wasco County, OR. Land ownership within the project area includes BLM held lands and private property. Land use within the project vicinity includes dryland agriculture, open space, and cattle grazing. The approximate site elevation is between 960 and 3,000 feet above sea level. The project is located in semi-arid shrub-steppe habitat typical of the region, composed primarily of native bunchgrass, big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), and native forbs in a region largely devoid of trees.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

Environmental Resource Impacts	No Potential for Significance	No Potential for Significance, with Conditions
1. Historic and Cultural Resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Explanation:

The proposed BPA access road was previously surveyed in 2016 and three cultural resources were identified within the APE. All proposed work would occur within the existing road prisms and would not result in disturbance outside of previously-disturbed roadbeds. The APE consists of the existing roadbed and adjacent roadside, up to 25 feet from the road centerline on both sides of the road. The vertical APE is approximately 30 centimeters. No ground disturbance is expected outside of the existing roadbeds for this project. BPA mailed the determination letter to the Oregon SHPO and tribes July 17, 2018. The thirty day waiting period has elapsed without comment; consultation is complete. In the event that archaeological or historical materials are discovered during project activities, work in the immediate vicinity would stop, the area would be secured, and the SHPO and the environmental project lead would be notified.

2. Geology and Soils	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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Explanation:

The project includes laying gravel on an existing road prism, installing drain dips and waterbars to improve roadway drainage, and replacing existing gates. The project also includes roadway reconstruction along the northern-most portion of the project at operating mile 33. The proposed action would conserve soil resources overall by reducing ponding and soil erosion within the roadway. The U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service in cooperation with the Oregon State Department of Agriculture has identified an area within operating mile 33 as Farmland of Statewide Importance and Prime Farmland. The existing access road within operating mile 33 is proposed for roadway reconstruction, which may necessitate disturbance of soil outside of the existing road prism.

Approximately 2,147 lineal feet of the proposed roadway reconstruction of the existing access road within operating mile 33 occurs within Farmland of Statewide Importance. Farmland of Statewide Importance is

defined as “...important for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage and oilseed crops. Farmlands of statewide importance include those that are nearly prime farmland and that economically produce high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods.”

In addition, approximately 474 lineal feet of the proposed roadway reconstruction within operating mile 33 occurs within an area mapped as Prime Farmland. Prime Farmland is defined as “...land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and that is available for these uses. It has the combination of soil properties, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields of crops in an economic manner if it is treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods.” This specific soil is considered Prime Farmland only if irrigated. Currently, the area is not under irrigation; therefore, this area would only be considered to be Prime Farmland if irrigated now or in the future.

To avoid and/or minimize potential impacts to these farmland areas, the following BMPs would be implemented:

- The roadway reconstruction would be limited to the existing road prism in this location and no new impacts to prime farmland or farmland of statewide significance outside of the road prism would occur.
- Proposed construction, equipment and material staging, and any off-road travel within these areas would be restricted to the existing roadway prism.
- No sidelaying of topsoil, subsoil, or other roadway material would be permitted.

Therefore, with these BMPs in place, impacts to prime or unique farmland would be avoided or minimized.

3. **Plants** (including federal/state special-status species)



Explanation:

Vegetation in the project area is composed of primarily native bunchgrass/big sagebrush shrub-steppe community typical of the region, with yellow rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus nauseosus*), antelope brush (*Purshia tridentata*), cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), lupine (*Lupinus* spp), and a variety of native bunchgrasses and forbs. Portions of the existing roadway are heavily overgrown with native and non-native herbaceous and woody vegetation typical of the surrounding landscape growing within the roadway, making road travel hazardous. No trees would be removed as a result of the project; however, any vegetation growing within the existing roadway would be cleared. No federally-listed or proposed-listed plant species or their designated critical habitats under jurisdiction of the USFWS are documented to occur within 2 miles of the proposed project area. No special-status plant species or their habitats were observed during the field survey due to lack of suitable habitat. A Letter of No Effect has been completed to document compliance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and has been submitted under separate cover to BPA. Therefore, the proposed action would have no effect on special-status plant species. Impacts to native and non-native vegetation would be limited to the existing road prism along the proposed 19,300 lineal feet of mowing within the road prism.

4. **Wildlife** (including federal/state special-status species and habitats)



Explanation:

An official federally-listed species list was requested from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Information, Planning and Conservation database (IPaC) on January 29, 2018 (updated). No federally-listed or proposed-listed wildlife species or their designated critical habitats under jurisdiction of the USFWS have

been documented to occur or have the potential to occur in the region. The proposed project actions would mainly occur within the existing road prism and any impacts to non-listed wildlife species would be temporary in nature and limited to construction within the road prism. See the ESA Letter of No Effect for this project for further details. Therefore, the project would have no impacts to federally-listed wildlife and limited impacts to other native wildlife species.

5. **Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish**
(including federal/state special-status species and ESUs)



Explanation:

The existing road crosses several mapped unnamed seasonal drainages to the Deschutes River (or tributaries to the Deschutes River). All drainages within the project limits were dry at the time of the site visit and were found have an ephemeral or seasonal flow regime. Surface water flow within the drainages would likely be limited to winter and spring following snowmelt and/or during heavy precipitation events. No suitable habitat for special-status or other aquatic species was found to occur within the project area. An official federally-listed species list was requested from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Information, Planning and Conservation database (IPaC) on January 29, 2018 (updated). Bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) is listed as threatened under jurisdiction of the USFWS and is documented to occur within 2 miles of the proposed project limits in the Deschutes River. In addition, StreamNet indicates that the proposed project is located within the range of Middle Columbia River Steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) Distinct Population Segment (DPS), listed as threatened under jurisdiction of NMFS and documented to also occur in the Deschutes River and selected tributaries. No suitable habitat for these species occurs within the project limits and no projects actions would result in effects to downstream waterways entering the Deschutes River or its fish-bearing tributaries; therefore, there would be no impacts to federally-listed or other aquatic species. See the Endangered Species Act Letter of No Effect for this project for further details. All proposed work would maintain existing drainage patterns during precipitation events. The work as proposed is exempt from Corps Section 404 and DSL permit applications. Therefore, the project would have no effect to waterbodies, floodplains, or fish.

6. **Wetlands**



Explanation:

No wetlands are present in the project area. Work would be limited to upland environments. Therefore, the proposed action would have no impacts to wetlands.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**



Explanation:

Groundwater and aquifers would not be impacted by the proposed project as the project does not include any groundwater withdraws or aquifer recharge areas.

8. **Land Use and Specially Designated Areas**



Explanation:

No change in land use is proposed as part of the project. Operating Miles 34, 35, and 36 occur within the upper portions of the federally-designated Deschutes River Wild and Scenic Corridor, greater than two miles from the Deschutes River. The project proposes to maintain existing conditions by conducting

routine maintenance of the existing BPA access road network, and adding new drainage features and gravel along the existing road. The project would not increase road traffic, would allow for additional non-authorized access, and no new features are proposed. The project does not trigger Section 7(a) of the Federal WSR Act (work altering bed or banks), as the project does not have an impact under the following WSR categories: “Direct and Adverse”, “Invade the Area or Diminish”, or “Invade the Area or Unreasonably Diminish”. There are no restrictions, permits, or agency notification processes for maintenance projects within the Deschutes River Wild and Scenic Corridor that occur outside the bed or banks of the Deschutes River. Therefore, the project would have no impact to land use or specially designated areas.

9. Visual Quality



Explanation:

There are no residences within visual range of the work limits. The project is greater than two miles from the Deschutes River. The proposed project features and construction equipment are consistent with existing roads and would not be expected to be visible from recreationists on the Deschutes River. Therefore, there would be no impacts to visual resources.

10. Air Quality



Explanation:

The proposed project is expected to reduce dust generation and improve air quality along the rural access road by covering exposed soils with a gravel surface layer. Minor vehicle emissions during construction would be temporary in duration.

11. Noise



Explanation:

Noise generated from construction is expected to be localized and temporary in nature. Construction is expected to last less than four weeks. The current level of road use is not expected to change, and no operational noise increases are expected.

12. Human Health and Safety



Explanation:

The project would develop a site-specific health and safety plan to address any hazards during the proposed work. The proposed work is necessary to ensure ongoing safe and reliable operation of the transmission line and to maintain power delivery in the region. Project activities would not impact human health or safety.

Evaluation of Other Integral Elements

The proposed project would also meet conditions that are integral elements of the categorical exclusion. The project would not:

- Threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory, or permit requirements for environment,

safety, and health, or similar requirements of DOE or Executive Orders.

Explanation, if necessary:

- Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators) that are not otherwise categorically excluded.

Explanation, if necessary:

- Disturb hazardous substances, pollutants, contaminants, or CERCLA excluded petroleum and natural gas products that preexist in the environment such that there would be uncontrolled or unpermitted releases.

Explanation, if necessary:

- Involve genetically engineered organisms, synthetic biology, governmentally designated noxious weeds, or invasive species, unless the proposed activity would be contained or confined in a manner designed and operated to prevent unauthorized release into the environment and conducted in accordance with applicable requirements, such as those of the Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the National Institutes of Health.

Explanation, if necessary:

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

The Access Road Engineer would contact adjacent and potentially affected landowners prior to project construction.

Based on the foregoing, this proposed project does not have the potential to cause significant impacts to any environmentally sensitive resource.

/s/ John Wiley
John Wiley
Physical Scientist

Date: September 7, 2018